

# AG ONE Newsletter

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*AG ONE is a periodic newsletter on legislation, regulations and agricultural topics produced by Phillips Associates expressly for the Pennsylvania State Council of Farm Organizations (PSCFO), an organization of over 60 organizations sharing an interest in promoting Pennsylvania's Number One industry, Agriculture. Questions or comments should go to PSCFO leadership or to 717/232-9665 or email to [xenobun@aol.com](mailto:xenobun@aol.com). AG ONE Newsletter, PA State Council of Farm Organizations, 26 North Ninth Street, Lemoyne, PA 17043. Material may be cited as long as PSCFO is given appropriate credit.*

**Dear Reader:**

**Of all the holidays, I am especially drawn to Thanksgiving. It is unheralded but sincere. It is also a statement of giving rather than receiving. It is a time to appreciate the blessings bestowed upon us and also a time to think about the most important things – our family, our friends, and our faith. I am writing to simply tell you that I appreciate you as readers who share an interest in knowing what's going on and also as friends. Thank you sincerely and Happy Thanksgiving.**

*Vince Phillips*

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## **BUDGET FOLLOW UP**

Despite enactment of the State Budget, there are still some loose ends.

- *Up in the air is Governor Wolf's plan to take out what amounts to an equity loan on the state-owned Harrisburg Farm Show Complex. His goal was to have the state receive a \$200 million loan which would have to be repaid to the lender over 30 years. There is speculation over the legality of such a move. The bidding period closed November 13.*
- The medical malpractice insurer of last resort, the PA Professional Liability Joint Underwriting Association (JUA), sued the Commonwealth for what it says is illegally taking \$200 million out of the insurer's reserves to help balance the State Budget. (Act 44).
- *Governor Wolf has dropped his plan to borrow against future profits from the PA Liquor Control Board after the PA Commonwealth Financing Authority approved plans to borrow \$1.5 billion from future Tobacco Settlement monies coming into the state. (Act 43 of 2017)*
- Unknown as of November 19 is from which dedicated funds Governor Wolf will take \$300 million. Thanks to authority given to him by the General Assembly in order to pass State Budget revenue bills, Governor Wolf can choose from as few or as many he wants. Of concern to the agricultural industry are special funds such as the Conservation District Fund and others dedicated to agricultural and conservation efforts.

## **WORKERS' COMPENSATION RATE HIKE POSTPONED**

A 6.06% increase in Workers' Compensation premiums that would have taken effect November 1 has been delayed as reported by the Central Penn Business Journal due to a challenge from the PA Association for Justice (trial lawyers). Details were not released by the Insurance Department but the following was given in response to a query from Phillips Associates: While the PCRB proposed a November 1, 2017 effective date in the filing, the Department can use up to 180 days to review the filing in accordance with Article VII of the Workers Compensation Act. While we don't anticipate needing the full 180 days contemplated by the law, we have not yet completed our review... If the filing is ultimately approved...there would be an amended effective date as we are now past the November 1, 2017 effective date proposed by the PCRB and cannot approve rates retroactively.

## POLITICS

- Former PA Secretary of Agriculture Denny Wolff is running for the Democratic nomination for the congressional seat being vacated by U.S. Rep. Barletta who is seeking the nomination to oppose Senator Casey in 2018.
- **PA Rep. Rick Saccone** (R-Washington/Allegheny) was chosen as the GOP candidate in the special election to succeed resigned U.S. Representative Tim Murphy. He defeated two PA Senators, Kim Ward and Guy Reschenthaler to win the Republican nomination. The special election will take place March 13. The winner would serve out the remainder of Murphy's term, meaning that the winner faces a re-election contest in November 2018.
- **House Speaker Mike Turzai** (R-Allegheny) *announced his candidacy for the Republican nominee for Governor on November 14. His announcement brings to four the Republicans vying for the nomination: Senator Scott Wagner (R-York), Allegheny County health consultant Paul Mango and Pittsburgh attorney Laura Ellsworth.*
- January 25 is the date of the special election to replace **Rep. Marc Gergely** (D-Allegheny). This district is traditionally Democratic. Rep. Gergely was forced to step down after pleading guilty to violating gambling laws.
- **State Representative Justin Simmons** (R-Northampton/Lehigh/Montgomery) *has withdrawn from the contest for the Republican nomination to succeed retiring U.S. Representative Charles Dent.*

## BILLS SIGNED BY GOVERNOR

Signed by the Governor October 30 was **House Bill 790** (controlled and noxious weeds) which is now Act 46 of 2017. Prime sponsor is House Agriculture & Rural Affairs Minority Chair Eddie Day Pashinski (D-Luzerne). **House Bill 176** (Pickett-R-Bradford) is now Act 35 after being signed by Governor Wolf October 25. It exempts roadside marketing stands and some animal feeding operations from Uniform Construction Code (UCC) building requirements.

## QUICK LOOK AT LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

- **Senate Bill 740** (Aument-R-Lancaster) continues Universal Service Fund (land-lines for rural areas). Status: Senate Agriculture & Rural Affairs Committee
- **Senate Bills 819 and 820** (Aument) agritourism liability are in Senate Agriculture & Rural Affairs Committee and Senate Judiciary Committees respectively.
- **House Bill 544** (Moul-R-Adams) is in the House Appropriations Committee.
- **House Bill 577** (Everett-R-Lycoming) Marcellus natural gas royalty 12.5% guarantee to leaseholders is in the House Environmental Resources & Energy Committee. There is also a discharge resolution to have the full House take up the matter, bypassing the committee.
- **House Bill 944** (M. Keller-R-Perry) Commission for Agriculture Education is in the Senate Agriculture & Rural Affairs Committee.

## GRANTS

- Up to \$1,600.00 from KidsGardening can go to nonprofit, school, or youth programs that plan a new garden or expand an existing one. Deadline for applications is December 8, 2017. [info@kidsgardening.org](mailto:info@kidsgardening.org) ; 802-660-4604
- Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) grant applications are due December 5, 2017. Awards are capped at \$15,000 and applicants must work with a technical advisor such as an Extension educator or private crop consultant. Details: <http://www.northeastsare.org>